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ABSTRACT

Ethnographic research examined the culture of a Knoxville, Tennessee, middle-school technology education classroom before, during, and after a summer youth development experience. The summer camp provided technology education and leadership development to middle- and lower-class students. Several observations of salient behavior were made with particular attention to five previously determined factors of job success: ambition, self-control, organization, enthusiasm, and conscientiousness. Three students were observed for baseline data prior to the summer camp experience. Post-camp observations were collected in the classroom/laboratory from interactions with the teacher and other students. The study found many changes did occur. Students who attended the summer camp showed more leadership, organization, motivation, and better use of time after the experience. They were also more enthusiastic and ambitious. The study concluded that summer camp appeared to have positive effects on the five factors of job success, but that further research is needed to sort out the actual causes of the positive change in behavior, since the students also got older during the research and other factors may have influenced them. (KC)

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A TWO YEAR STUDY OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

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A TWO YEAR STUDY OF
YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
FOR TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

One of the most effective programs for the growth and development of young people is summer camp. Each summer parents across the nation send their children to a variety of summer camps. This study outlines that experience as conducted in Tennessee for Technology Education students and the positive and negative outcomes. Also reported are the findings of an ethnographic study of some of the summer program participants.

Educators are increasingly asked to utilize the public school as the medium for developing character in young people in the United States. This task is one that is easily asked but difficult to accomplish. Some suggest that ordinary classroom experiences lend very little to character development. However, the positive experiences from youth development projects do appear to effect the affective behavior of students who participate. Unfortunately little evidence exists to support the continuation or expansion of these experiences or its effect on students' affective behavioral characteristics.

The summer camp **can** be one of the most effective programs for the intellectual growth and maturity development of young people. A structured summer camp can combine the best of growth and development opportunities with educational enrichment. This study outlines the summer camp experience and the outcomes, and reports the findings of an ethnographic study of some of the summer program participants.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to review the unique summer experiences of technology education students that participated in Tennessee's Summer Youth Development Program at Camp Clements state park and to report the results of an ethnographic study of some of the participants. This ethnographic study will explore the affective behavior changes that take place as a result of their summer experience.

Method

This study utilized an ethnographic research design to examine the culture of the middle school technology education classroom before, during, and after a summer youth development experience. It was an investigatory process designed to construct descriptions of total phenomena influencing students affective behavior.

Selection of Participants

Due to the time and monetary restraints of the researchers and to facilitate the requirements of the research design, a middle school with a technology education program that was located close enough for a daily commute by the researchers was necessary. The selection of the school was further delimited to technology education programs with active Technology Student Association clubs with intentions to participate in the summer youth club experience. Finally, a school with an aggregate of students from low to middle socio-economic status and with a racial mix representative of the geographic area was required. Such a school was selected in Knoxville,

Tennessee that met the requirements of the design and restraints of the researchers.

Experience and Role of the Researchers

In an ethnographic study the researcher is the data collection instrument. Because of the importance of this role a discussion of the researchers is deemed necessary. The researchers for this study had a unique mix of experiences and training. Both were former industrial arts teachers with teaching certification and teacher education experience in the field. One had received recent training in the ethnographic research process and served to coordinate the design and data collection. The other had worked closely with the youth leadership program for several years and participated as an instructor full time in the summer youth program. The researchers employed a graduate assistant trained in ethnographic research to assist in the data collection.

Data Collection Strategies

Prior to the design of this ethnographic study several attempts by the researchers had been made to collect data documenting the effects of summer youth leadership camps. Contemporary survey instruments reviewed did not measure the attitudinal changes expected by the researchers. It was reasoned that classroom and laboratory activities and camp leadership training of participants must be observed in depth to establish the baseline data and to measure changes that may occur. For these reasons it was decided that the researchers would observe participants in the classrooms and laboratories with as much frequency as time and money would allow.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were gathered prior to the summer experience in the technology education classroom/laboratory. Regular attendance in the classroom by the researchers was required to enable the researchers to achieve the confidence of both teacher and students. Several observations of salient behavior were made with particular attention to five previously determined factors of job success. These factors were: Ambition; Self-Control; Organization; Enthusiasm; and Conscientiousness (Brauchle, Petty, and Morgan, 1983). This pre summer period allowed for the collection of baseline data. Three students were singled out for observation during this period.

During the one week summer leadership camp, the researchers participated in the activities with the participants. The previously identified students were known only to the researchers and were observed as they interacted within the culture of the camp and the camp dynamics.

The post camp observations were collected in the classroom/laboratory from interactions with the teacher and other students. Notations of expected and unexpected behavioral changes were made and recorded.

Interpretation of Findings

Changes in behavior did occur. However, the time elapsed was two years and the students advanced two grades in school. The researchers also found many dynamics effecting the behavior of the students other than the summer camp experience. The summer camp, on the other hand may have precipitated

some of these "other dynamics" that appeared to occur.

We expect as teachers, for the summer leadership camp to serve as a training center for leaders. One thing we may not expect is the effect of expected outcomes. In other words, we expect people trained as leaders to act as leaders. As teachers we tend to give leadership roles to those trained in leadership, whether or not they are leaders. While this may be fine and good experience to our students, it confounds specific characterization of the summer leadership camp experience.

Baseline Data.

To more fully explain the findings a discussion of the classroom/laboratory is appropriate. Baseline data revealed three groups of students. The first are the super stars. These students are involved in the youth club and work closely with the teacher. At the other end of the spectrum are the special education and problem students. These students get a lot of attention but do not accomplish very much. In the middle are the phantoms, students that are almost non existent.

An interesting observation is that the youth club members did not segregate to themselves but moved among the other two groups. They seemed to have friends from all levels in the class. However, the teacher did give the club members more responsibility such as helping some of the special education students with their projects.

The leaders, youth club members, in the technology education class did not exhibit leadership characteristics in other classes. They were involved in

projects and activities in other classes but did not "stick out" as leaders as they did with their technology education participation.

Summer Youth Camp.

The students from the participant school blended in well with students from other schools at the summer camp. Their behavior was average when compared with others during the one week experience. The summer camp was a mix of sports activities, including basketball, canoeing, volleyball etc. and classroom training in leadership and group activities such as skits and extemporaneous speaking.

Post Camp Data.

After the camp experience the students exhibited more independence in the classroom/laboratory. They have been given more responsibility by the teacher. More importantly, they are assuming more responsibility and are making decisions about proper use of class time on projects and activities.

It is interesting to observe these students assuming leadership roles without direction. The teacher facilitates this behavior by giving these students freedom and leeway with their responsibilities.

Students who participated in the summer youth camp require much less direction and discipline in the classroom/laboratory. They present little problem to the teacher with regards to class/lab projects and assume, without direction, the responsibility of helping other students who are having problems with assigned tasks.

These same students came to the class/lab in their free time and during lunch to work on skits and projects. They are approached these activities with increased enthusiasm and they are demonstrated an ambition not observed before the summer camp experience.

Evidence of classroom/laboratory activities reveal more organization than was exhibited previously. And self-control is manifested in their judicious use of time. There is no question that an increase in their conscientiousness has been observed.

Summary.

It was the expectations of the researchers that the summer youth camp experience would assist in their leadership skills. The results of this observation are obscured by the confounding factors of teacher expectations. Therefore this finding cannot be verified without further study.

However, a close look at the five factors reported to lead to job success reveals significant increases in these characteristics. These characteristics were: Ambition; Self-Control; Organization; Enthusiasm; and Conscientiousness. Certainly these competencies were improved. And the improvement was probably due to the Summer Youth Camp experience.

Unfortunately this report does not allow for the in-depth discussion of the findings and the probable causes that will be required for a complete ethnographic study of the culture of the summer youth camp and the technology education classroom/laboratory. These findings as reported in this study are preliminary and must be followed by further investigation and data

collection. Such a follow up and replication of this study is recommended by these researchers to verify the findings of this study.

Regardless of the possible weakness of educational research to answer real questions of the value and worth of educational experiences, this study certainly has demonstrated that a summer youth camp can lead to improved enthusiasm and ambition of the participants. Their self-control and organization skills can be improved and they can achieve a heightened conscientiousness toward their work and others within their group.